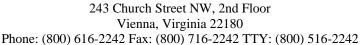
National Child Care Information Center









DEVELOPING and IMPLEMENTING EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES: THE CASE of RHODE ISLAND

The Early Learning Standards Project grew out of efforts to implement the 1998 Statewide school readiness initiative, Starting RIght. The Department of Education and the Department of Human Services provide the leadership and support for the project. A State Level Steering Committee, with representatives from State agencies, Head Start, and Kids Count, provides overall direction and guidance to the project. The following document briefly describes the goals and activities of developing and implementing early learning guidelines in Rhode Island from 2001 to the present.

Early Learning Standards Project: Phase One (2001-2002)

Goals: ♦ Engage Partners ♦ Increase Public Awareness ♦ Develop Draft Standards

Two subcommittees were established to meet the goals of engaging partners, increasing public awareness, and developing draft standards.

- 1. The *Early Childhood Task Force* included individuals representing the diversity of the child care workforce. Over the course of eight months, this group developed the early learning guidelines.
- 2. The *Community Review Group* provided input at key points in the development process. Public meetings were also held to inform stakeholders and provide opportunities for feedback and comment on the draft standards.

After 10 months in development and a rigorous process of outreach, the final draft document was released in January 2002. For 4 year olds, the *Rhode Island Early Learning Standards*, *Final Draft* encompass eight domains of learning and development. Available on the Web at http://www.ridoe.net/child_family/earlychild/Childstandards.htm.

Early Learning Standards Project: Phase Two (2002-2003)

Goals: ♥Pilot Use of Standards in Variety of Settings ♥ Evaluate Impact ♥ Disseminate Widely

The *Rhode Island Early Learning Standards*, *Final Draft*, were piloted in five communities around the State. Community-based groups of practitioners from center-based programs, family child care homes, public school programs, and Head Start, along with parents, participated in an eight-month professional development series. A mentor/facilitator assigned to each community guided implementation of the standards by aligning program curriculum and assessments with the standards. An evaluator assessed both the usefulness of the standards and the impact on practice with 100 early care and education providers. Family members were also included in the evaluation.

As a result of the pilot project, the guidelines were again reviewed and revised. The final version of the standards and a poster identifying the domains and key learning areas for quick referral by parents or staff were produced. Materials are available in both English and Spanish.

Early Learning Standards Project: Phase Three (2003-2004)

② Engage Families, Legislators, and State/Community Leaders

Consultants were hired to develop eight modules for the Statewide roll out of the community-based training. The modules cover topics such as aligning curriculum with standards, identifying methods and strategies of assessment, using assessment to refine curriculum for teaching and learning, and reflecting on professional growth. Twelve Master Teachers with experience in implementing the standards participated in a two-day professional development experience to become certified as Trainers. Each certified Trainer is responsible for presenting the eight modules over a 10-month period to one or more community-based groups. The Trainers' Network meets once a month to further refine modules and share training strategies.

The training is offered free of charge to 10 community-based groups annually. Each group must include practitioners from center-based settings (including Head Start); public school programs; and certified family child care settings. Practitioners are asked to document that their program meets at least some of the quality indicators that identify the program as structurally ready to implement the standards. Participating groups are selected in accordance with established project priorities which include: a broad geographic distribution across the State; participation of urban communities; inclusion of children with special needs; and a commitment to systems change toward best practice for children and families. The evaluation protocol used in the pilot project is being used with 200 early care and education providers participating in the 2003-2004 professional development series. The evaluation will include an assessment of child outcomes in the spring of 2004.

Participants receive professional development credits. Rhode Island's professional development plan, Harbor of Opportunities for Professional Education (HOPE), addresses the alignment of core competencies and career lattice levels with the *Early Learning Standards*.

A Family Engagement Workgroup has been established based on feedback from the pilot project. The workgroup is co-chaired by a parent and a practitioner with expertise in family involvement. The workgroup has developed materials to assist families in using everyday moments to support the goals of the standards.

Kids Count, the national effort to track State by State status on the well-being of children, provides expertise on the development of materials to help State and community leaders understand the linkages among the Early Learning Standards project and other early care and education initiatives in the State.

For more information, contact Barbara Burgess at bburgess@ride.ri.net or Reeva Sullivan Murphy at rmurphy@dhs.ri.gov. Also see the SAM 2003 CD-ROM, Supporting an Early Learning Framework, which contains a video clip, PowerPoint presentation, and electronic links related to Rhode Island's efforts to implement early learning guidelines (click on the Professional Development theme on the main menu, click on the video icon next to "Linking Early Learning Guidelines to the Professional Development System").

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